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ABSTRACT

This booklet examines various problems involving the moral content and implications of education and discusses some of the difficulties school officials face in trying to accommodate the diverse moral values of different segments of American society. The author argues that, because unintentional moral training takes place in all schools through their "hidden curriculum," schools should develop a deliberate and systematic approach to moral education. The booklet is organized into three major sections. Section 1 presents a brief case study of the West Virginia textbook controversy and points out the difficulties that public controversies over evolution, sexism, and racism create for textbook selection. Section 2 discusses the background and rationale for moral education and reviews some representative literature on the topic. Section 3 examines different approaches to designing a moral education program, focusing mainly on Kohlberg's moral development model and on various criticisms of Kohlberg's approach. (JG)

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SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

DIGEST

Conflicting Moralities in Education

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FOREWORD

Both the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management are pleased to continue the *School Leadership Digest*, with a second series of reports designed to offer school leaders essential information on a wide range of critical concerns in education.

The *School Leadership Digest* is a series of monthly reports on top priority issues in education. At a time when decisions in education must be made on the basis of increasingly complex information, the *Digest* provides school administrators with concise, readable analyses of the most important trends in schools today, as well as points up the practical implications of major research findings.

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of conflicting moralities in education encompasses a wide range of questions, nearly all of which share a capacity for arousing controversy. Although the word *morality* is often associated with sexual behavior (as in the "New Morality"), it actually refers, in its broadest usage, to the standards people use for judging human conduct, for deciding what is right and what is wrong.

How people make such basic judgments depends, in large part, on how they view the world and mankind's place within it. For some, morality may be dictated by the specific teachings of a particular religion; for others it may be more generally derived from the overriding world view shared by a number of religions (as in the Judeo-Christian heritage); for still others it may be based on a purely secular view of man as the center of the universe, "the measure of all things."

Because moral beliefs are determined by how a person sees the world, they may come into conflict in a wide range of areas, including (to name a few) religious, political, economic, and social questions; in fact, almost anything about which people may disagree can ultimately be seen as a moral question.

Moralities are obviously in conflict in education in such timely and controversial areas as prayer in the schools, sexism and racism in curriculum, busing, sex education, the teaching of everything from evolution to Transcendental Meditation, textbook selection procedures, the rights of gay teachers, and so on almost *ad infinitum*. In view of the volatile nature of each of these questions, the word "controversial" may be far too weak. Conflicting moralities in the schools have, on occasion, led to angry confrontations, disruption of the educational process, and even violence.

If moral beliefs are controversial, they are also intensely personal; as a result, many people may feel that moral conflict should be kept out of the schools entirely. Where there is

moral conflict, the best position for a publicly funded educational system is one of neutrality. Indeed, the very idea of permitting schools to become involved with (and ultimately, perhaps, to "take sides" on) a moral question, thereby teaching ideas that conflict with the moral beliefs of some taxpayers, seems incompatible with the basic values of a democratic, pluralistic society.

When the job of education was primarily to instruct children in the "three r's," it may have seemed possible to approach the ideal of an effective educational system free of moral conflict. But even the teaching of factual and well-defined subjects may ultimately raise moral questions. For example, reading and writing are basic components of public education, but even they are not without some potential for generating controversy: Does teaching only in English implicitly insult the cultural identities of non-English-speaking Americans? Is the only "correct" form of English that which reflects the usages of white, suburban Americans, while the idioms of nonwhite urban Americans and other groups are officially "incorrect" and thus, implicitly, of no value? Similarly, strictly factual questions of geography may ultimately touch on political and moral issues: What are the proper boundaries of Israel? What land mass should properly be designated as "China"?

Such questions may seem farfetched or trivial to some people, but those whose cultural identities or political beliefs they concern would certainly not consider them so. What they suggest very clearly is the all-encompassing nature of morality; if morality depends on how we see the world, then anything that teaches about that world is ultimately a moral question.

One particularly critical area of moral content in education can be found in the school's "hidden curriculum," the things the school teaches implicitly, often even unintentionally. How a subject is organized or taught may tell the child as much as or more than the explicit content of the teaching. The tone of voice a teacher uses in answering a question may communicate far more than the words spoken in that answer;

the way a teacher enforces discipline may "teach" the child far more about the nature of justice than any formal study of legal systems.

The existence of a hidden curriculum is one of the strongest arguments advanced in support of the idea of introducing programs of "moral education" into school curriculum. Unexamined moral training takes place in schools all the time through the hidden curriculum; but morality is far too important to be treated in such a haphazard, almost accidental fashion. Indeed, the argument continues, the very fact that a school does *not* directly concern itself with moral questions may convey to students the idea that such questions are not particularly important. As a result, schools must recognize that, like it or not, they cannot avoid being involved in moral education and must develop a deliberate and systematic approach to the subject.

Since conflicting moralities in the schools have generated controversies that America's legislatures, law courts, and school boards have been unable to resolve, our discussion of the subject will necessarily be tentative. And since moral questions may touch on almost any subject, we will also be selective. We will first consider the problem of textbook selection as a kind of case study of some of the difficulties schools may face in attempting to accommodate the diverse values of various groups in America's pluralistic society. We will then turn to a brief outline of the background, rationale, and methods of the new curricular area of "moral education."

TEXTBOOKS: A CASE STUDY IN CONFLICT

One persistent dilemma the schools face in the area of textbook selection, as in much of education, is the problem of attempting to avoid moral conflict and still teach effectively. On the one hand, educators are continually searching for materials that are timely, realistic, and, above all, relevant enough to stimulate and challenge students who are often "turned off" by the educational process. On the other, parents may bitterly resent the use of their tax dollars to expose their children to ideas that they may consider alien, immoral, obscene, or worse. For educators, the difficulty of resolving this problem can often prove disheartening and, occasionally, overwhelming; books that can stimulate children without offending parents must sometimes seem as elusive as unicorns.

Over the years, zealous banners of books have discovered objectionable material almost everywhere. *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, for example, presents youth with a terrible example, since the bandit's exploits of robbing the rich and giving to the poor blatantly follow the standard commie-pinko line. Similarly, *Crime and Punishment*, written by a Russian, almost certainly contains subversive ideas. The "homosexual overtones" of *Moby Dick* could easily corrupt impressionable young minds. Even the *Girl Scout Handbook* has been exposed as "un-American." More ominously, a school teacher was actually sentenced to 90 days in jail and fined $100 for the heinous crime of asking students to read *The Stranger*. These examples may seem laughable (though the convicted teacher was probably not amused) and frivolous, but the charges were, in each case, made in dead earnest.

The overriding issue at the heart of these and many other disputes has been the question of how to define an "acceptable" school book. For some, the mere presence of a four-letter word makes a book obscene; for others, an obscenity is anything that debases human dignity. Both groups agree

that school children are impressionable, that school materials can affect them, and that there must therefore be some criteria for regulating the selection of such materials. Unfortunately, this general consensus is not very helpful in devising specific selection guidelines, and those charged with choosing school books can be certain of only one thing: As Donelson points out, "any work is potentially open to attack by someone, somewhere, sometime, for some reason."

The Controversy in Kanawha County

Ferreting out four-letter words and "subversive ideas" (usually anything the censor happens to disagree with) have been the traditional methods of book banners, and recent events have shown that such practices are far from obsolete. A massive movement to remove textbooks from the Kanawha County, West Virginia, schools recently gained national prominence.

The conflict seems to have begun as a school board faced the routine task of approving the adoption of textbooks recommended by a selection committee (composed, as stipulated by state law, of five teachers). The husband of one board member began reading the textbooks and was appalled by what he found. His wife, who had voted on the texts but had not actually examined them, was equally horrified, and so were many other local parents. When most of the books were adopted in the face of vocal opposition, irate parents responded by keeping their children out of school and setting up picket lines throughout the county; even coal miners walked off the job in sympathy with the protesters.

Some of the protests became violent, with shootings, assorted beatings, numerous threats against the life of the school superintendent, and generalized paranoia. Finally, despite the fact that many of the books in question were standard textbooks, used without difficulty in many parts of the country, the school board yielded to pressure and agreed to withdraw the objectionable books, at least temporarily.

It would be comforting to dismiss the whole incident as a bizarre aberration perpetrated by ignorant crackpots and

outside agitators; certainly it would be difficult to believe that the schootings and beatings were the work of sane, responsible citizens. But the entire protest cannot be dismissed so lightly. If the protesters represented a minority, it was certainly not an insignificant one; a local opinion survey suggested that as many as 40 percent of the parents in the area wanted the books permanently removed from the schools.

Nor should it be surprising to note that Kanawha is West Virginia's most prosperous, populous county. Indeed, as Nelkin notes, "Most textbook controversies issue not from rural folk in Appalachia but from middle-class citizens, many of whom are technically trained." Another disturbing fact about this protest is that parents had such strong, even violent reactions to a wide range of textbooks already in use in many other places. This suggests that there may be an enormous gap between what professional educators see as useful materials and what parents consider morally acceptable. The former read Eldridge Cleaver and find relevance and insight; the latter see only subversion and obscenity.

The underlying causes of such disputes are probably insoluble, and some problems are unavoidable. But several writers offer practical suggestions for dealing with textbook controversies. The most important such measure seems to be the establishment of clearly articulated criteria for book selection and well-defined, understandable procedures for handling complaints. These procedures, once established, should be consistently followed so that, for example, an irate parent is not permitted to disrupt a school board meeting with complaints about a book he or she has not even discussed with the teacher or principal involved. Those who do make complaints should be assured of fair and sympathetic hearings; it is crucial that they feel that someone is paying attention to their concerns. In addition, there should be orderly procedures for appealing decisions.

Another useful step is to include parents on committees for textbook selection and for hearing complaints. In some cases, though, state laws may require that selection decisions be made entirely by professionals. There is also the feeling

expressed by some educators that only professionals are qualified to make such decisions and that parents, without any specific expertise, are simply not competent to participate in such processes. It is true that parents do lack professional training for textbook evaluation, but the claim that they should, therefore, have no voice in this aspect of education may serve to strengthen the feeling of parental powerlessness that is at the heart of many of these controversies.

In fact, one of the crucial problems in contemporary education is the parental attitudes of suspicion and mistrust that have developed toward the schools. Parents feel that they are excluded from meaningful participation in formulating school policies, while the real decisions are made by mistrusted "professionals" who may have great expertise about effective learning but who often show little empathy with the personal moral concerns of parents. Nelkin summarizes the underlying dilemma of textbook selection:

> From the professional perspective, designing a school curriculum is a technical enterprise that is best organized by experts, so that the curricula will provide the student with the best available information. From a local perspective, however, public education also transmits values and beliefs. Since such values and beliefs are very much family matters, parents must be involved.

Evolution versus Creation

One area that would appear to be an unlikely focus for controversy is the study of a relatively factual, objective discipline such as biology. But because personal morality is, as we have suggested, a reflection of the individual's world view, even some aspects of scientific inquiry have moral overtones. This is particularly true in the teaching of the theory of evolution, where religious beliefs directly conflict with scientific orthodoxy. As Nelkin points out, "modern biological research is based on evolutionary assumptions, which . . . [are] 'the warp and woof of modern biology'." As a result, biology textbooks not only teach evolution explicitly, but they also use evolutionary thinking as an organizing principle in developing biology as a coherent, unified academic

discipline. This teaching approach seems both scientifically dubious and moraliy repugnant to creationists, who believe in the Biblical account of the divine creation of the universe.

If the controversy between evolution and creation were simply an issue of science versus theology, it would be sufficiently complex to defy ready solution. But the problem is further complicated by the work of scientific creationists who hold advanced degrees in science and who, according to Nelkin, "maintain that they are scientists who are engaged not in a controversy between religion and science, but in a debate about the validity of two scientific theories."

Creationists do research and disseminate their findings in journals and textbooks to support their basic claim that evolution is only one theory of the origin of life on earth whereas creation is another and that the two deserve equal time in education. The most conspicuous fact about this approach is that it exerts pressure on education from complementary directions: creation should be taught in the schools in order both to respect the religious views of the creationists and to reflect the diversity of scientific explanations for the origin of life on earth. Thus far the creationists have worked for the adoption of a policy of "equal time" in the teaching of biology under which creation and evolution would be presented as two alternative hypotheses about the origin of mankind. Their efforts have also resulted in changes in the content of some texts, and the termination of federal funding for *Man: A Course of Study*, a social science curriculum whose reliance on evolutionary thinking they found objectionable.

Nelkin, not herself a creationist, points out that the conflict over creationism raises questions far beyond the simple teaching of biology in the schools. She suggests, for example, that the "moral implications that can be drawn from the concept of evolution and the threat it presents to absolute ethical values are clearly far more important to many laymen than the details of the concept's scientific verification." Biology based on evolution may seem to imply that man is merely another type of animal, ultimately subject to no law above that of the "survival of the fittest." Since this is the

very doctrine used to justify the rapaciousness of the robber barons and empire-builders of the nineteenth century and the genocide of the totalitarians of the twentieth, it is easy to understand how morally committed people might have misgivings about the larger moral implications of evolution.

Another problem in the creationist controversy, no less than in other sorts of educational conflict, is an increasing anger over the tendency for educational "experts" to proclaim policy in peremptory and impersonal ways. Nelkin refers to parental resentment of "an impersonal educational bureaucracy that fails to represent their interests and that insults their personal beliefs. They are not reacting against science so much as resisting its image as an infallible source of truth that denies their sense of place in the universe." Here, again, the basic issue appears to be the need for education to be more responsive to parental concerns.

Sexism and Racism

Concerns with the moral content of school textbooks have also arisen from another direction. Many parents and educators have become concerned with sexism and racism in education; sexual and racial stereotyping is one variety of moral training that has for many years been communicated by the school's hidden curriculum.

As educators have increasingly come to recognize the importance of education in shaping student attitudes and values (that is, have begun to realize that there *is* a hidden curriculum), textbooks have increasingly come under scrutiny. As a result, such standard (and four-letter-wordless) children's fare as *Little Black Sambo* and the Uncle Remus stories have been attacked for fostering and perpetuating demeaning racist stereotypes that diminish the humanity of black people. Even a book as well intentioned as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has been criticized for similar reasons. Other areas of education have likewise been challenged for their racism. For example, texts for the study of American history have, aside from the obligatory—token—paragraph about George Washington Carver, been examinations of white

history. Recent textbooks have attempted to remedy such shortcomings by avoiding racial stereotyping and recognizing the contributions that diverse racial groups have made to the development of American society.

Even as those who organize and select textbooks had become aware of racism, writers began pointing out some of the ways that education has treated women, too, as second-class citizens. Shelly, for example, expresses concern for the effects of the stereotyped sex roles found in school textbooks—"boys were found to be presented as active, masterful creatures, while girls were passive, dependent, and weak." Brody, too, discusses the effects of instructional materials on sex stereotyping. She reports on studies that found that, in elementary readers, girls were implicitly offered a far narrower range of career choices than boys. One survey found readers depicted males in 147 different occupations, while females were shown in only 25 (including such improbable role models as fat lady in the circus, witch, queen, and parent—this last one conspicuously *not* offered as a possible male career). These texts generally imply that "women center their lives and interests on men, while men have other goals to achieve."

School textbooks that foster such stereotypes—suggesting that blacks have not contributed to the development of American society or that women are capable of doing fewer types of jobs than men—do a disservice to all who read them. Not only do they demean the human dignity of nonwhites and women by suggesting that they are somehow of less value than white men, but they are also factually inaccurate and thus give an incomplete, distorted picture of the nature of human experience.

Perhaps the fact that emerges most clearly from a discussion of controversies over textbooks is that the moral content of education is being increasingly subjected to careful scrutiny. It seems safe to predict that, on this basis, there may well be increasing controversy and conflict over the use of various types of instructional materials. How successfully the schools are able to handle such conflict may well depend on their ability to respect and respond to the values of parents.

THE RATIONALE FOR MORAL EDUCATION

> Historically, instruction on morality has been included as a significant part of [American] education. Recently, we have abandoned any formal treatment of morality in the classroom lest we offend some pupils or indoctrinate others.
>
> *Biskin and Hoskisson*

As this statement suggests, it is the removal of moral content from education, rather than its inclusion in education, that represents a departure from traditional practice. The belief that education should restrict itself to the teaching of the "three r's" or their contemporary equivalents is a relatively recent and, some would argue, myopic idea. The traditional function of education has been to educate the whole child; moral training is no less important in this endeavor than purely academic instruction. Indeed, the ancient Greeks actually considered the development of character as the primary purpose of education, with intellectual achievement a valued but subordinate goal.

The Rise of Secularism

Education has traditionally served as a means of socializing children to become useful, productive citizens. As the values of a society change, so, too, do the functions it assigns its schools. Since colonial times, America has changed from a fundamentally religious society to one that is primarily secular. Lauderdale outlines some of the manifestations of this change. In colonial society the secular order was often considered merely a reflection of the spiritual, and education had moral content designed to serve the "two-fold purpose of eternal salvation and the preservation of the state." As the demands of commerce became more pressing, "those worldly concerns that were acknowledged as secondary . . . took on more weight," and morality became identified with the more secular values of "good citizenship and commitment to

country." Today, Lauderdale continues, this tendency has been developed to a point where education serves primarily as "a massive training program for teaching the skills required by industry."

Today, religion continues to be a meaningful force in the personal lives of many Americans, but on an institutional level its position is clearly secondary. Large secular institutions—corporations, labor unions, even government itself—seem increasingly to dominate American life. Perhaps the ultimate measure of the ascendancy of secular values, however, is the fact that some churches hold large amounts of stock in corporations.

Because moral instruction and, indeed, morality itself have often been closely linked to the formal practice of organized religion, the secularization of society has, in large part, been blamed for the current absence of moral content in education. This development was, in fact, neither necessary nor inevitable; morality can as readily be linked to rational thinking as to religious dogma. Nevertheless, a brief discussion of the current place of religion in the schools may do much to clarify the contemporary status of moral education.

In popular mythology, much of the blame for making the schools (and, as some would argue, the whole of society) "Godless" has been placed on the U.S. Supreme Court. The Court's decisions banning certain types of prayer from public education have gained particular attention in this area. As Biskin and Hoskisson point out, these decisions were important, but the Court hardly invented the idea of secularism, in society or in education:

> The decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court . . . judicially sealed a secularizing trend in American society. The Court said, in effect, that the moral and ethical system of mainstream Protestantism, which was dominant in the common school of Horace Mann and has been influential since his time, is no longer legally valid for the public schools of the U.S.A. The void caused by these decisions has been left unfilled.

Lauderdale partially questions this view, suggesting that the relationship between religion and public education has

been and remains ambiguous. He notes, for example, that "one cannot yet label American schools as secular," since as recently as the 1960s a dozen states *required* Bible recitations in the public schools. Such practices, of course, raise the very question of the degree of separation of church and state necessary to ensure freedom of religion and respect for diversity in a pluralistic society that prompted the Court's decisions in the first place. But while the forms of religious observance have persisted in public education, Lauderdale questions their substance, arguing that "the avoidance of controversy (legal and otherwise) which is dictated by non-sectarianism has forced religious education in the public schools which is perfunctory at best." Schools often offer purely formal religious instruction, designed solely to avoid the appearance of "Godlessness," while at the same time they scrupulously avoid dealing with any substantive moral issues.

Insofar as this is true, schools have been approaching moral education backwards, emphasizing religious forms even at the expense of moral content. Paradoxically, it is precisely the forms of religious practice that cause church-state separation difficulties; the mere recitation of passages from the Bible, without reflection or discussion, may easily become a mechanical exercise, offensive to the religious beliefs of many but morally illuminating to very few. Conversely, the underlying values the Bible articulates form what is commonly called the Judeo-Christian heritage. This more general set of values, deeply embedded in America's legal and political institutions (if not always in the people who administer them) does reflect many of the consensus values most Americans share.

The fact that such a consensus exists and, indeed, forms the basis for our nation's existence provides a clue to the shape of the moral training public education might provide. Gorsuch, for example, comments as follows:

> In a pluralistic society, it is true that minor variations in value systems need to be respected and the student left relatively free to come to his own conclusions. However, students do need to be encouraged to value justice, life,

> fairness in dealing with other people, and the other basic values of Western culture. The teaching of those values and of the necessary skills to practice them are well within both the educator's mandate and the range of possibilities that can be actualized.

Cleaver is even more explicit, suggesting that moral education is not only a legitimate function of public education but a necessary one as well, since, at its heart, democracy "is a moral system of government [that] depends on moral man for its success." Indeed, a California statute, quoted by Berk and others, explicitly charges the schools with responsibility for teaching "the principles of morality, truth, justice, patriotism, and a true comprehension of the rights, duties, and dignity of American citizenship." These shared values may indeed be used as the basis for developing a program of moral education that respects the cultural and religious diversity within society. Shaver, however, cautions against overestimating the dimensions of this consensus, suggesting that "the strength of the basic values as a cohesive force for society is their vagueness in conceptual meaning."

Why Teach Morality?

Paradoxically, even as the place of moral content in public education has become more tenuous, the need for it has become more pressing. Enormous changes in communications, technology, and even lifestyle seem to have combined to create a general sense of moral confusion in contemporary America. The ostensible causes of symptoms of this phenomenon (high crime rates, televised violence, sexual promiscuity, corruption in high places) are as diverse as the prescribed cures (tougher law enforcement, full employment). But several writers hope that moral education might provide a partial solution to the problem. Raths, Harmin, and Simon, for example, suggest that there may be a relationship between values confusion and behavior problems, since "persons with unclear values lack direction in their lives, lack criteria for choosing what to do with their time, their energy, their very being." The moral confusion in society represents

a fundamental change. In the past there was "a kind of common understanding of what behavior was good and what was bad, of which attitudes and aspirations were appropriate and which were inappropriate." That general sense of moral clarity has largely been eroded, and this, too, makes it necessary for the schools to take a more active role in moral education.

The arguments for the historical appropriateness and contemporary necessity for schools to become involved in moral education are complemented by a third fact—that such involvement is unavoidable. Schools may wish to avoid controversy by staying away from moral questions, but there is a growing recognition that such an approach is not possible.

Some schools do, however, try to evade the question of moral education by denying that it has a place in the schools; students formulate their own values outside of school, but how they do this and what those values may be are no proper concern of public education, it is claimed. Gorsuch, however, argues that this approach is unrealistic, since it rests on the false assumption that "man is fundamentally a non-valuing, nonethical being." On the contrary, "man has always functioned as an evaluating creature and has judged the world around him in good-bad categories." As a result, "Ignoring values actually turns out to be the teaching of unexamined values in an unexamined way." Biskin and Hoskisson concur in this judgment, commenting that it "is impossible for the schools to stay out of values. . . . Values are inevitably influenced by the school structure, the adults who work in it, the relations of all involved, and the choice of subject matter and materials."

An additional problem with attempting to exclude moral content from a school's overt curriculum is that, if this is done, such content will be conveyed only through the hidden curriculum. The very fact that a school chooses *not* to deal directly with moral questions implicitly tells the student that the school places little value on morality. Further, as Stager and Hill observe, in the hidden curriculum of many teachers, morality "is tied to punctuality, neatness, docility, and con-

scientiousness in schoolwork." Those values may be useful in keeping order in the classroom, but if they are the only values the school teaches, the child may deduce that they are more important than other, more fundamental values such as justice, honesty, and respect for human dignity. Thus the hidden curriculum may, in the absence of more formal instruction, provide moral training that is trivial and distorted; this, too, forces the schools to take an active responsibility for moral education.

Yet another approach schools may take to avoiding moral education is to attempt to remain value-neutral. With this approach, the school accepts the fact that it will influence the child's values, and, as a result, deliberately attempts to leave those values unchanged. This approach, too, rests on a set of false premises. It assumes, for example, that it is possible to remove the moral content from a question or subject. It further assumes that a teacher can be sufficiently objective to recognize his or her biases and offer teaching that is free of any taint of those biases. Gorsuch cites a study showing that researchers cannot even run rats through mazes without unintentionally influencing them to run according to expectations. How, then, is a teacher to be objective and nonmanipulative in the far more emotional and subjective area of moral values?

Nelson summarizes the problems schools face in attempting to confront the demands of moral education:

> The notion that one should not engage in moral teaching is logically possible but not practically possible. It would seem that all that is possible in this dimension is to do it well or ill, in an examined and conscious manner or naively, with all shades of in-between.

APPROACHES TO MORAL EDUCATION

Despite the formidable array of arguments offered to demonstrate the need for moral education, the subject itself remains surprisingly ill-defined. It may well be that moral education, like motherhood, is an abstract ideal that everyone supports in principle. In practice, though, there may be almost as many specific definitions of moral education as there are sets of moral beliefs. Stager and Hill outline some of the questions "moral education" might encompass:

> Many of those who are pressing for moral education in the schools obviously have in mind the discussion of a wide range of issues including parent-child relationships, civil disobedience, business ethics, the moral status of war, mercy killing, inequalities in society, crime and punishment, and "quality of life."

These are some of the most complex, difficult, and emotionally volatile issues in contemporary American society, and each has the capacity to generate almost unlimited controversy. It is probable that no two people could completely agree on exactly *what* schools should teach about any of these questions. The satisfactory resolution of this problem of specific content is clearly necessary to the successful design of any program of moral education.

Superka and Johnson list a number of different approaches to devising such a program. Inculcation, the explicit teaching of specific values, is probably the most traditional type of moral instruction. It is, however, particularly vulnerable to the problem of content. The idea that schools should teach values that will help mold students to conform to some ideal, while it may seem commendable to those who agree with the specific content of such training, is not likely to gain favor from those holding differing moral beliefs.

Values Clarification

An alternative method is to deal with timely and specific

questions obliquely, teaching children how to develop and understand values, rather than telling them what those values ought to be. Carbone describes the underlying rationale for such a program: "The aim of moral education at this level is to aid students in becoming independent moral agents, people who act in accordance with principles freely chosen as the result of analytic reflection." This respect for students as valuing individuals is basic to the method of "valuing" or "values clarification" that Raths, Harmin, and Simon have developed. One of their central premises is that, since values arise out of life experiences, they will inevitably differ and that the stifling of such differences is not a proper concern of education. Instead, teachers should actively work to help students understand their own values; it is the process of developing and examining values, rather than the specific content of those values, that is of real importance.

One method of values clarification is to raise and discuss moral questions in class. This should be done in a nonjudgmental way; in discussions, teachers will seek to clarify student responses, to help each student think about and understand his or her own value system. The focus is on illuminating and accepting values, rather than on moralizing about or rejecting them. This approach has proved useful, and Raths and his colleagues note that "the research shows that students become more vital and purposeful when given opportunities to clarify their own values."

Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Judgment

The work of Kohlberg, which seems to dominate the contemporary study of moral education, shares some of the assumptions of Raths, Harmin, and Simon about the importance of using discussion and analysis of moral questions as a method of clarifying values. Kohlberg's specific approach is based on an analysis of the thought processes that govern children's perceptions about moral questions. As his colleague Selman notes, "Children have their own theories and interpretations of the social and physical events in their lives. Children *structure* or organize their experience; each general

restructuring or reorganization of experience is called a 'cognitive stage'." Kohlberg analyzed these stages and concluded that there were six cognitive stages specifically related to differing levels of moral judgment. These stages, listed under three broader headings, are as follows:

Preconventional: judge actions solely according to results

Stage 1: Punishment and obedience orientation—right action consists of avoiding punishment and deferring to power

Stage 2: Instrumental-relativist orientation—what is right is what satisfies one's needs

Conventional: conform to and support the established order

Stage 3: "Good boy-nice girl" orientation—good behavior is what wins approval

Stage 4: The "law and order" orientation—what is right is duty, respect for authority, maintaining the social order for its own sake

Postconventional: define moral principles valid beyond the authority of the group

Stage 5: The social contract, legalistic orientation—right action is based on general individual rights and agreed-on standards—emphasis on what is legal, but with the possibility of changing laws (This is the "official morality" of the American government and the Constitution)

Stage 6: The universal-ethical, principle orientation—right is based on conscience, self-chosen ethical principles based on legal comprehensiveness, universality, consistency ("At heart these are universal principles of *justice*, of the *reciprocity* and *equality* of human *rights*, and of respect for the dignity of human beings as *individual persons.*")

It is not so much the existence of these stages as their properties that make them useful for moral education. Each stage is a structured whole, organized so that an individual will be consistent in the level of his moral judgment. The stages form an invariant sequence; movement is always from a lower to a higher stage. In addition, the stages are hierarchically organized, with higher stage thinking incorporating that of lower stages. The individual tends to prefer the highest stage available to him, but can only comprehend reasoning at a level at or one stage above his own.

Moral development beyond stage one is a result of the child's efforts to get a better match between his or her own moral structures and the structures of the moral or social

situations he or she confronts. The basic method of stimulating moral development is to use the examination of moral dilemmas to facilitate the transition from one stage to the next. This is often done by exposing the children to situations that pose problems for their current moral reasoning level, but can be more satisfactorily resolved using moral reasoning at a higher level. When they experience the greater completeness and logical consistency of the higher stage, they may learn to prefer the reasoning implied by that stage.

Kohlberg concedes that moral judgment is not invariably linked to moral behavior, but judgment is the only distinctively moral factor in such behavior. Insofar as it is possible to stimulate cognitive development through these stages, it is also possible to *teach* moral judgment. Stager and Hill concur with this claim:

> Data gathered so far support the view that teaching intervention does in fact increase the student's ability to think critically on moral issues and that theoretical discussion is a useful tool for increasing the level of moral reasoning.

Landsman discusses a sample program of moral education based on Kohlberg's work that is designed to encompass a wide range of moral dilemmas. Specified times are set aside for the study (through film-strips, readings, and role-playing) of a situation that generates conflicts that require moral judgments. Discussions are held first in small groups and then among the entire class. In addition, situations are discussed as they arise in the classroom. There are certain rules governing all types of discussions: Children are encouraged both to respond to situations and to discuss the reasons for their responses. Discussions tend to concern concepts such as fairness, honesty, rules, loyalty, friendship, anger, and jealousy. Teachers try to stimulate discussion at a stage one level above that of the least developed individuals in the group, but the discussions are predicated on the belief that there is no one "right answer to a true social question."

Objections to Kohlberg's Approach

A number of writers offer specific criticisms of certain

aspects of Kohlberg's approach. Bricker, for example, cautions against methods that underestimate the importance of the emotional aspects of moral questions. A dilemma *is* a dilemma precisely because it generates strong feelings. Thus the heart of moral education should be a sense of personal involvement in the questions being considered. If the feelings of students are important, those of teachers may be even more so:

> A teacher's personal morality should be viewed as a crucial part of a moral-education program, not as an unwanted intrusion that can be avoided through the use of a teacher-proof program which focuses upon the cognitive side of moral judgment only.

Leming, too, raises questions about the detachment that Kohlberg's approach seems to imply. He suggests, for example, that the effectiveness of a program may be closely related to the way the moral questions are examined; it is crucial to hold discussions in which students are asked to make decisions about what *they* would do, rather than merely to judge what a hypothetical character has done. Similarly, discussions centering on real-life situations directly relevant to students' personal experiences may be more meaningful than examinations of "classical" moral dilemmas, which raise abstract issues and "involve characters with whom the subject has trouble identifying."

Another question raised by Kohlberg's work is whether it is actually possible to develop a system of moral education that is genuinely nonindoctrinative. Kohlberg claims that, since his stages are universal, the progression from one to another is natural—though by no means inevitable—and thus nonindoctrinative. The Educational Testing Service suggests that, in fact, Kohlberg's stages are culture-specific, based on the internalizing of democratic-liberal values, with "justice" as the highest value. The teaching of such a value system is, as we suggested earlier, generally considered a proper function of a system of public education in a democratic society, but that merely means it is indoctrinative in an acceptable way.

Wynne suggests that, since there "is more popular agreement about many values than educators realize," it is not inappropriate for schools to use an approach that is avowedly indoctrinative. This need not mean that children will be taught values their parents might find objectionable, since Wynne sees another change in the nature of public education:

> Parents should be given more genuine choices about school enrollment. They should be able to place their children in schools with policies that reflect their values, so that educators in such schools could comfortably carry out a particular provalues policy.

This notion of diversity within an educational system but relative homogeneity within an individual school may suggest a partial solution to the entire problem of attempting to provide meaningful education for children without antagonizing parents.

Some Unanswered Questions

In a sense, this discussion of moral education has barely scratched the surface. As we have seen, the subject itself is not new, but the idea of discussing it explicitly rather than simply leaving it within the "hidden curriculum" does represent a departure from recent practice.

There are a number of unanswered questions about moral education. For example, given the context of textbook difficulties outlined above, what is the public response to moral education likely to be? In order to limit our discussion to manageable proportions, we have refrained from discussing that question and a wide range of other issues as well: the implications of any specific program for teacher training; methods for integrating moral instruction into the overall curriculum; the types of social interaction that are involved in moral education, particularly the function of the teacher as a model for students; and diverse other questions of equal importance and complexity. Indeed, it is quite possible that moral education may become one of the most pressing questions in American education in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Our discussion is merely an introduction to it.

CONCLUSION

In a sense, a public school system is very much a mirror of the society it serves. The presence of moral conflict within American education is thus in no sense remarkable. Indeed, it seems clear that, in a democratic society that values freedom of thought and expression, conflicting moralities are an inevitable—and not undesirable—part of a system of public education. As a result, while moral conflicts may create problems for education, the idea of attempting to "solve" such problems absolutely is clearly unacceptable. The only possible "solution" of this kind, imposing a general conformity on the educational system (or the larger society), is incompatible with America's basic values. Nevertheless, it is also clear that the unregulated competition of many conflicting viewpoints, while it may reflect a healthy diversity, can easily become unmanageable and disrupt the effective functioning of the schools.

The task of education is, then, to find some middle ground, some way of respecting the needs of differing points of view and still teaching effectively. No matter how successfully this is done, it seems safe to predict that moral controversy—whether about textbooks, moral education, or some other question—is and will continue to be a basic fact of American educational life. The best the schools can do is to work actively and resourcefully to provide quality education within the context of respect for the diversity necessary to an open, pluralistic society.

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